

Fire and Emergency Response



The CDF Mission

The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection protects the people of California from fires, responds to emergencies, and protects and enhances forest, range, and watershed values providing social, economic, and environmental benefits to rural and urban citizens.

PEOPLE TO MEET THE CHALLENGE: The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) is known for its extraordinary response to emergencies. The Department is always ready to respond regardless of the emergency - wildland fires, structure fires, automobile accidents, medical aids of all sorts, swift water rescues, civil disturbances, lost hikers,

hazardous material spills, train wrecks, floods, earthquakes - the list is endless. CDF's firefighters, fire engines and aircraft respond to an average 7,500 wildland fires, and nearly 300,000 other emergencies each year. Department crews and equipment are a familiar site throughout the State with responsibility for the protection of over 31 million acres of California's privately-owned wildlands, and for emergency services of all kinds in 35 of California's 58 counties through contracts with local governments. The heart of CDF's emergency response capability is a force of approximately 3,800 full-time fire professionals, foresters, and administrative employees; 1,400 seasonal firefighters; 5,600 local government volunteer firefighters; 2,600 Volunteers In Prevention; and 4,300 inmates, wards, and corpsmembers that provide 195 fire crews.

FACILITIES THROUGHOUT THE STATE: The Department is divided into two regions with 21 administrative units statewide. Within these units, CDF operates 634 fire stations (229 state and 405 local government). CDF, in collaboration with the California Department of Corrections, California Youth Authority, and California Conservation Corps, operates 41 conservation camps spread throughout the state. CDF staffs 13 air attack bases and nine helitack bases that allow aircraft to reach any fire within 20 minutes.

EQUIPMENT TO DO THE JOB: CDF operates over 1,050 fire engines (370 state and 689 local government), 105 rescue squads, 13 aerial ladder trucks, 58 bulldozers, five mobile communication centers, and 11 mobile kitchen units. The Department funds, via contract, an additional 82 engines, and 12 bulldozers used in six counties - Kern, Los Angeles, Marin, Orange, Santa Barbara, and Ventura. From the air CDF operates 15 800-gallon airtankers, eight 1,200-gallon airtankers, 11 Super Huey helicopters, and 17 air attack planes.

COOPERATION AMONG AGENCIES: In a state as large and populated as California no one emergency response agency can do it all. That is why cooperative efforts via contracts and agreements between state, federal, and local agencies are essential to respond to emergencies like wildland and structure fires, floods, earthquakes, hazardous material spills, and medical aids. The CDF Cooperative Fire Protection Program staff coordinate those agreements and contracts. It is because of these types of cooperative efforts that you may see fire engines and crews from many different agencies at the scene of an emergency.

THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF TRAINING: The merger in 1996 of CDF and the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) brought together two entities, each known to be among the best institutions in the nation for fire training education. The CDF Academy and the OSFM State Fire Training system provide training not only for CDF forces, but also for over 950 fire departments statewide. Through practical training exercises and classroom courses, every California firefighter is exposed to training standards that have been approved by the CDF Office of the State Fire Marshal. Offering more than 1,000 classes annually, its programs reach over 24,000 students and have issued over 100,000 certifications to those who makeup California's fire service.

LEARNING TO LIVE WITH FIRE: California must do more than just suppress wildfires once they start. Reducing the risk of large wildfires, the costs of fighting these wildfires, and loss of property and natural resources is the goal of the California Fire Plan. CDF and the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection share the task of fire protection planning within state responsibility areas. Working with the Board, CDF developed the Fire Plan as a proactive approach to reduce wildfire losses and contribute to ecosystem health. The Plan emphasizes community involvement, defining assets at risk such as homes and natural resources, and developing and implementing prefire management solutions. Prefire management solutions can include fuel breaks, fire-safe landscaping, removal of hazardous vegetation, and inspections for fire-safe clearance around homes. CDF staff inspect more than 50,000 properties each year to ensure that wildland homeowners comply with fire safety regulations. Educating communities and homeowners on fire safety is also an ongoing CDF role. The Department's "Fire Safe, California!" campaign targets the growing number of citizens who choose to live in the wildland areas. The program provides fire safety information via television, radio, print and the Internet. The CDF Volunteers in Prevention (VIP) Program has grown to include over 2,600 citizen volunteers throughout the state. These VIPs donate their time, under the supervision of CDF, to teach children and adults basic fire and life safety measures. In addition, each of CDF's units initiate their own fire safety and prevention campaigns tailored to the needs of their communities. Many CDF units have established local fire safe councils to bring together citizens, local fire agencies, local governments, and other groups affected by wildfire such as insurance companies.

FIRE AND RESOURCE ASSESSMENT: Current information on the supply, availability and condition of California's forest and rangeland resources is needed to develop appropriate policies to ensure the health and productivity of these wildlands. The FRAP unit identifies emerging resource issues on wildlands, analyzes the results of different types of land use and management on wildland conditions, reviews and evaluates policies by federal, state and local agencies as they relate to wildland protection. FRAP also identifies and analyzes policy options for the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection through demographic and other types of data, including information on vegetation, wildlife, soils, watersheds, fire behavior, and ownership.

PREVENTING FIRES TO KEEP YOU SAFE: CDF's fire engineering component interprets and enforces fire safety codes and laws covering fire extinguishers, fireworks, flame retardant chemicals, pipelines, building materials, powerlines, railroads, film industry fire prevention requirements, and vapor recovery systems. Determining wildland fire causes and investigating all fires and explosions occurring in state-owned/occupied buildings, interviewing witnesses, issuing citations and setting up surveillance operations keep CDF Arson and Bomb law enforcement personnel busy year-round. Additionally, the unit provides assistance to local fire and law enforcement agencies in arson, bomb, fireworks, and fire extinguisher investigations, as well as disposal of explosives. The unit includes four accelerant detection dogs, trained to locate substances used when fires are intentionally set. CDF Arson and Bomb personnel have a conviction rate of 90 to 95 percent.

See the CDF web site at www.fire.ca.gov

July 2000

